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ABSTRACT

Tennessee has had a state-mandated system of teacher evaluation in place since 1984. This paper presents findings of a study that examined the effect of state-mandated teacher evaluations on: (1) teacher performance, and (2) the nature and amount of supervision provided to teachers. Data were derived from a survey of 58 teachers from 21 Tennessee school districts. Only three percent of respondents said that they had received supervision for purposes other than evaluation; almost all reported that they had been supervised for evaluation purposes. In addition, most of the teachers believed that the supervision had little influence on their classroom instruction. They wanted and valued instructional supervision, but did not receive it. Finally, the findings indicate that building-level administrators played a major role in realizing the expectations of Tennessee's state-mandated evaluation system. (LMI)

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EXPECTATIONS VERSUS REALITIES: SUPERVISION UNDER A STATE-MANDATED TEACHER EVALUATION SYSTEM

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EXPECTATIONS VERSUS REALTIES: SUPERVISION UNDER A STATE-MANDATED TEACHER EVALUATION SYSTEM

Current school reform efforts and concomitant state-initiatives mandating teacher evaluation are, at their core, directed at improving the instructional performance of teachers as a primary means of enhancing student achievement and learning. They have led to calls for refocusing and reframing the role of school administrators to make "instructional leadership" a priority in their work. Instructional leadership and school effectiveness have been shown to be positively correlated (Bossert, et. al, 1982; Greenfield, 1987; Andrews and Soder, 1987; Smith and Andrews, 1989). Thus efforts directed to developing and nurturing the instructional abilities of staff are perceived to pay off in increased student achievement.

While there is no clear behavioral definition of instructional leadership, there is little disagreement that it is about behaviors that significantly affect teacher instruction, that it is about instructionally-related supervisory activities in which administrators and others engage. and that it goes beyond the formal evaluation

activities mandated by the state or the school district (Hoy and Forsyth, 1986; Reynolds and Martin-Reynolds, 1988; Zahorik, 1978).

> Providing instructional leadership requires the administrator to be involved in issues of curriculum and classroom instructional practices. One of the typical ways in which principals enact their instructional leadership roles is by visiting and observing classrooms to carry out instructional supervision. Many consider such observations to be the most direct and legitimate opportunity a principal has to influence positively the instructional practices of teachers in the school. (Lee, 1991, 83)

Despite the perceived importance of instructional supervision, administrators do not appear to value the activity (Sergiovanni, 1985) and "avoid the practice...if at all possible (Blair, 1991, 102)." Research shows that principals, at least, spend comparatively little time on instructional leadership tasks (Martin and Willower, 1981; Morris, et. al, 1984; Wright, 1989) and the time they do spend is too brief, fragmented and unsytematic to impact instructional practices.

It is within this context that state-mandated systems of teacher evaluation have been enacted. They are designed to provide a measure of public accountability for the performance of teachers and to engender efforts on the part of

administrators to improve that performance. Clearly, such expectations require more than the typical three formal classroom visits required in most mandated evaluation systems. At the very least, they require increased instructional supervision. To what extent, however, do state-mandated teacher evaluations do this, i.e., lead to increased instructional supervision of teachers?

The State of Tennessee has had a state-mandated teacher evaluation in place since 1984. It mandates the regular evaluation of teachers and dictates the form, substance and process for the evaluation. To begin to examine the question of the effect of such mandated evaluations on teacher performance and the extent to which the mandated evaluation influenced the nature and amount of supervision being provided to teachers, 58 teachers from 21 school districts in Tennessee completed a survey about supervision and evaluation prior to and since the implementation of the state-mandated system.

The teachers included all of the students enrolled in three core graduate courses in educational administration in one semester. While the group may not be representative of all teachers in the state, they were reasonably diverse. The 21 different school districts they represented included urban, rural, small-city and suburban districts. They taught at all levels of schooling, elementary (32%), middle/junior high school (20%) and high school (48%). They represented a

range of teaching experience from 1-22 years (mean: 11 years). However, 41% had taught 6 years or less.

The survey instrument constructed for the study posed forced-choice and open-ended questions about what they had experienced in the name of supervision and evaluation (what, by whom, why, how, how often) prior to and since the implementation of the state-mandated system, and what they perceived they had gained from what had been done. Data from forced-choice questions were treated using simple statistical procedures (averages, ranges and frequencies). Data from open-ended questions were analyzed using logical processes of categorization. Since the questions asked were relatively simple and direct, the answers engendered were in tern, relatively easy to categorize. Nevertheless, the researchers categorized such answers independently before comparing their categorizations. No discrepancies appeared in their categorization. The results of the analysis were shared with administrators in upper-level graduate classes as a reality-check. They were asked if what the teachers had said coincided with the reality of events as they saw them. By and large they saw the results as consistent with what they did and how they saw the reality.

FINDINGS

Respondents were asked whether or not they had received supervision for purposes **other than evaluation** at any time in their teaching careers. Seventy per cent replied no they had not. Of the 30% who said yes they had had such supervision, in explaining what had occurred, only two of the seventeen identified actions or activities which could reasonably be related to instructional supervision, and one of those two involved the supervisor taking over the teacher's classes to allow the teacher to see other classes. The remaining descriptions portrayed activities which were unrelated to supervision, e.g., came to talk to students about the importance of doing homework, provided help with testing, portrayed aborted supervision, e.g., "...came,looked, but gave no feedback," or were non-instructional activities, e.g., discussed extra-curricular activities. Thus, despite the fact that 17 of the 58 said they had received supervision other than for the purposes of evaluation, their explanations suggested that only two (3%) at most, had received such supervision. It also raised questions about the teachers' understanding of the nature and purposes of supervision.

In contrast, when asked if they had been supervised **for the purpose of evaluation** by building level administrators, all but one replied affirmatively. Five

wrote in "several times," rather than the number of times as called for, but the remaining respondents reported from one to twelve such experiences for an average of 4.7 evaluation experiences per teacher. Other than the fact that the overwhelming majority had had such experience, the number of such experiences held little meaning. In response to the same question with respect to evaluation by central office administrators, 44% indicated they had not been. The 56% that had reported supervision for the purpose of evaluation by central office administrators reported from two to four such experiences for an average of 3.2 experiences per teacher.

While the respondents are clearly receiving supervision for purposes of evaluation, as mandated by the state, they are just as clearly not receiving instructional supervision for purposes other than mandated evaluation. Further, the responses suggest that it is the building level administrator who is bearing the primary responsibility for such evaluations.

When asked if and how they believed they as teachers had "personally gained" from the state-mandated evaluation, 37% said not at all. Of the 63% who believed they had personally gained from the experience, only 6 of the 37 respondents identified hows that could be reasonably categorized under the rubric of instructional improvement related activities. They identified learning

about teaching techniques and of having strengths and weaknesses pointed out. The remaining 32 respondents indicated that they had gained from the recognition, affirmation and general praise, reenforcement and encouragement they had received. The latter did not appear to be attached to specific instructional activities, but rather to general comments made to the teacher, and to speak to the person more than the teacher. While such activities may owe more to conceptions of human resource development than instructional improvement, they nonetheless constituted important activities to the majority of those who received them. And it would be inappropriate to suggest that such nurturing is entirely unrelated to instructional improvement activities. Clearly, such activities influence the attitudes and morale of staff members, factors which may affect readiness and willingness to engage in improvement activities. Nonetheless, the relative absence of activities directly related to instructional improvement as a part of such evaluation is notable.

All but one respondent believed supervisors and the process of supervision were important to them in their position as teachers. Interestingly enough, in explaining why, they talked about how it could be or should be (not how it was), and their explanations were related to the potential for receiving help with classroom instruction, e.g. "It's important to help me become a better instructor;" "I need to learn what my strengths and weaknesses are." Even the one who

said no, did so on the basis of not seeing that they or it had made a difference for him or her in the past.

In responses directly related to their perceptions of the state-mandated evaluation, 73% believed it did not accurately reflect their abilities as teachers (versus 27% that did); 59% did not value the process (versus 41% that did); and 83% said that it had not influenced the way they taught (versus 17% who said that it had). This last finding was particularly interesting in light of the percent of respondents (63) who believed they had personally gained from the experience, reported above. While the respondents perceived they had gained personally, these gains were not related to classroom instruction, the intended area of such efforts.

When asked what the purposes of supervision should be in the best of all worlds, 90% identified instructional assistance and instructionally-related activities, e.g., methods of teaching, feedback about their teaching. Ten percent referred to managerial assistance, e.g., getting additional resources, helping equalize class size. The findings clearly suggest that the teachers queried identify supervision with instruction and instructional improvement, in consonance with the underlying intention of state-mandated evaluation.

CONCLUSIONS

If the expectations and intentions of the state-mandated evaluation are to impact classroom instruction directly by means of the evaluation process, and indirectly by moving instructional leadership to the forefront of administrator behavior, the findings raise serious questions about the likelihood that these expectations are being realized. If the perceptions of the respondents in this study are accurate and at all representative of teachers across the state, and they may not be, the expectations are not being realized. Teachers, at least in this study, are not receiving instructionally-related supervision, are not receiving supervision for purposes other than fulfilling the mandates of the state evaluation process, and even in the doing of this, the evaluation process is not perceived by them as influencing what they do in the classroom.

The respondents in the study believed instructional supervision to be important, wanted it, and identified supervision and evaluation with activities related to improving classroom instruction. These findings were consonant with findings of other studies conducted in the state before and since state-mandated evaluation (Lovell and Phelps, 1976; Beach, 1976; Patterson, 1990). Similar to the finding of those studies, there was a discrepancy between what the teachers wanted (expected?) and what they received. If the state-mandated system is about

instructional improvement, and if teachers want instructional assistance, as found in this and other studies, why is it that after almost 10 years, the evaluation system is realizing neither the state's expectations nor the teacher's desires?

The findings of the study suggest that building level administrators play a major role in realizing the expectations of the state-mandated evaluation system. Given what is and is not occurring, as reported by the teachers in the study, the findings raise questions about why what building level administrators are doing is so discrepant with what is desired and expected. In his study of supervision and evaluation since state-mandated evaluation, Patterson (1990) found that while principals and supervisors perceived that what they were doing in the name of state-mandated evaluation was beneficial to teachers and to the instructional program, teachers did not. As in the present study, such findings raise questions about the building level administrator in the process. To what extent do building level administrators feel comfortable with and competent in providing instructional supervision consonant with notions of instructional leadership? To what extent are they willing and able to be instructional leaders directly involved in the improvement of classroom instruction? These are critical, unanswered questions for a system that rests so heavily for its realization on the competence and commitment of those self-same administrators.

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